A TRUE STORY OF RESILIENCE, FAITH AND PURPOSE

AGAINST THE ODDS

A JOURNEY OF GRIT, GROWTH, AND BECOMING

DISCIPLINE
EDUCATION
PURPOSE

I came from very little, but I refused to stay there."

FROM STRUGGLE TO SUCCESS. FROM DREAMS TO DESTINY.

LINDANI CHARLSE MAYISELA

STUDENT. TUTOR. MENTOR. DREAMER. ACHIEVER.

AGAINST THE ODDS

A Journey of Grit, Growth, and Becoming

By Lindani “Charlse” Mayisela

About the Author

Lindani Mayisela is a Computer Science graduate, Software Developer, tutor, and mentor from rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

His journey is defined by resilience, discipline, and an unwavering belief in growth. After facing academic setbacks, financial challenges, and multiple delays in accessing higher education, he made the bold decision to return to high school and rewrite his path—both literally and figuratively.

Through hard work and consistency, he improved his academic results significantly, earning a Bachelor’s pass with distinctions and gaining admission to study Computer Science. During his studies, he not only excelled academically but also discovered a passion for tutoring and mentoring, helping other students navigate challenges he once faced.

Today, Lindani is committed to using his story to inspire, uplift, and empower young people—especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds—to believe in their potential and pursue their goals with courage and determination.

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What is this book about?

Against the Odds is not just a story—it is a journey of resilience, sacrifice, and becoming. From walking long distances to school in rural KwaZulu-Natal, to wearing one shirt and washing it every day, to being scammed, rejected, and forced to take multiple gap years.

Lindani Mayisela's story is a powerful reminder that success is not always a straight path. When life delayed him, he didn't quit. When opportunities were limited, he created his own. When doubt crept in, he chose discipline.

Through pain, perseverance, and purpose, he transformed his life—rising from a 23 APS score to 38 APS, earning multiple distinctions, and completing his qualification with outstanding academic performance.

This book is for:

- The student who feels left behind
- The dreamer with limited resources
- The person who knows they are capable of more

If you have ever questioned your path, this story will remind you: It's not about where you start— it's about how far you are willing to go.

What is inside this book?

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Chapter 1:
Where It All Began

2013 was the year everything quietly began—though at the time, I had no idea.I had just completed primary school and stepped into Grade 8 at Bambanani High School in the rural area of Pongola, KwaZulu-Natal. It was more than just a new school. It was a completely new environment—new people, a new language, and a new way of life.

At 13 years old, I walked into that world not alone, but alongside my older sister. That gave me comfort—but it didn’t make things easy. Getting into the school was not simple. I remember arriving with my mother and sister around 3 p.m. after traveling a long distance. We were told it was too late and had to come back the next day. Going home was not an option—we didn’t have enough money, and it was already late.

My mother called my grandmother, who arranged a place for us to sleep at a friend’s house. That night, without fully understanding it, I stepped into a journey that would demand everything from me. The next day, we were admitted. Classes had already started. There was no time to adjust—we had to begin immediately. My mother bought us the basics: a shirt, trousers, and shoes. That was all she could afford. Then came the real question: Where would we stay? We couldn’t afford rent. For two weeks, we stayed at my grandmother’s friend’s house and walked about 2 kilometers to school every day.

At 13, it was overwhelming.My grandmother searched tirelessly for a place for us to stay—going door to door, asking for help. We moved from one home to another, strangers in unfamiliar spaces, facing challenges that tested us emotionally and mentally.

In 2014, I finally moved into a place that felt more stable. Not perfect—but it felt like home. Looking back, I realize: this was where my foundation was built.

Chapter 2:
When Reality Became Real

Survival had become a daily habit for me by the time I matriculated in 2017. I awoke every day knowing that I had to create a strategy with very little resources. I just had one school shirt. I hand-washed it every afternoon after school and hoped it would be dry by the next morning. I had no choice but to wear it wet at times during the winter.

I frequently felt unique from the other kids at school. Some individuals had lunch cash, the right clothing, and support networks that I could only dream of. Since there were days when there was nothing else, I relied heavily on the food given at school. I learned to conceal my hunger behind a grin.

I didn't want to ask for help, so I looked for ways to live with respect. I did laundry twice a month for one of my teachers. The work was embarrassing at some point, but the little money I made each month allowed me to pay for my basic needs and toiletries. Others may have thought that amount was insignificant, but for me, it symbolized independence and survival.

I had aspirations of going to the matric dance, just like every other student in matric. At least once, I wanted to feel like I belonged, was proud, and was accepted. However, I was actually aware that it wouldn't occur. There was just no cash for tickets, transportation, or clothing. While others were getting ready, I resigned myself to the reality that certain events were beyond my grasp for the time being.

After finishing exams, I took a job as a *security-guard* hoping to finally earn something meaningful. I worked long hours believing that my effort would be rewarded. But when payday came, I received less than half of what I had been promised. I felt powerless and disappointed, but I had no energy left to fight.

Chapter 3:
Lost, Scammed, and Searching

I got my matric results in 2018. I got admission to diploma since I received 23 APS. I was still proud of the outcomes, even if they weren't exceptional, because I thought they marked the start of a new chapter in my life.

However, reality soon dawned on me. I hadn't submitted an application to any tertiary institution. I had no direction and had a limited comprehension of the university application procedure. No resources. There is no strategy. No guidance. I was at home attempting to figure out what to do next while others were getting ready for registration.

I then got an SMS from a random college stating that I had been accepted. I immediately believed it due to my thrill and despair. That message felt like an answered prayer to someone seeking for opportunity. My heart was full of hope when I shared the news, certain that my future was finally beginning.

I obeyed every command I received, saved my money, and travelled, only to find upon arrival that the whole thing was a fraud.

I recall rereading the messages on my phone over and over, feeling confused and ashamed. I hoped there had been some sort of misunderstanding, but deep down, I already knew the truth. I had been misled.

The agony wasn't simply about the money. It centered around optimism. It hurts to lose money when you have very little, but it hurts even more to lose faith in your future. I was embarrassed by how readily I had put my faith in strangers. I doubted my knowledge and good sense.

Chapter 4:
The Years That Tested Me

Although I wasn't sure what number of gap years meant at the time, 2018 was my first one. I could only tell that I felt trapped while the majority of my classmates were progressing in their lives.

I made another attempt in 2019. I sent in applications and expected a different result, but one rejection followed another. The weight increased with each. I began to wonder if education was really meant for me.

I worked as a *daka-boy*, performing physically demanding tasks like carrying bricks and mixing cement, to stay alive in the scorching heat. The job was physically demanding, but the emotional burden I had within was what hurts the most.

I would occasionally conceal myself out of shame when I saw former teachers or classmates going by. Life seemed to have passed me by. It was agony to see other people advance while I was stuck in the same spot.

I was on the verge of giving up altogether at times. I questioned if I should simply accept that this would be the course of my life. Something within me, however, resisted giving up entirely, even in the midst of those horrible times.

Chapter 5:
The Decision That Changed Everything

I made one of the toughest choices of my life in 2020, after years of frustration and doubt, I decided to return to school.

I was scared by the very thought of it. I was concerned about what others would think. I was concerned that I would be older than certain students. I was concerned about appearing like a failure. Returning to Grade 11 seemed like starting all over, while everyone else continued to advance.

I couldn't keep living with regret, though, despite the fear. I asked my dad to help me get back to school. The talk was intense since I knew that, at the end of the day, this choice would either make a big difference in my life or totally destroy my confidence.

Once again, I was accepted late. I had no proper uniform and very few resources. I borrowed old clothes from community members, washed them carefully, and wore them proudly because education had become more important than pride.

There were days I attended school hungry, tired, and emotionally drained. But for the first time in years, I also carried hope. I finally felt like I was fighting for my future instead of running away from failure.

Chapter 6:
Becoming Who I Was Meant to Be

In 2021, I rewrote matric with a completely different mindset. This time, I was no longer studying just to pass—I was studying to transform my future.

I had a planned and organized life. I went out of the house early in the morning and came back late at night. Even if some days were exhausting, I didn't want to pass up the opportunity I had been given.

I began spending more time helping classmates understand difficult topics. During those moments, I discovered something unexpected: I enjoyed teaching. Seeing someone understand because of my help gave me purpose and confidence.

I also became very interested in technology and computers at the same time. I was able to picture my future for the first time. I began to believe that my dreams were attainable rather than remote.

My confidence increased with the amount of effort I made to better myself. Over time, I began to view myself as someone capable of development rather than as a failure.

I experienced a transformation in my mind, body, and academics that year. I discovered that motivation alone is insufficient to get you everywhere that discipline can. I also learned that purpose is frequently found via action, not relaxation.

Chapter 7:
The Breakthrough

In 2022, the moment finally arrived. I received my matric results, and for a few seconds, I could barely believe what I was seeing. Bachelor’s pass with three distinctions, 77% average and 38 APS.

I refreshed the page multiple times because I thought I had made a mistake. The same person who once achieved 23 APS had now reached 38 APS. The same person who once felt lost and directionless had become one of the top-performing learners at the school.

I thought about every painful moment that led to that day—the gap years, the rejection, the hunger, the embarrassment, the doubt. Suddenly, all of it felt meaningful.

My family was proud. Teachers who once worried about me now celebrated with me. For the first time in years, I felt like I had finally proven something not just to others, but to myself.

That breakthrough taught me that transformation is possible when you refuse to quit on yourself. Hard work does not always produce immediate results, but consistency eventually changes your life. My results were more than marks on paper—they were evidence that growth is real.

Chapter 8:
The University Journey

Starting university was exciting, but it was also intimidating. Everything felt bigger, faster, and more demanding than I expected. Coming from a rural background, I sometimes felt out of place and uncertain about whether I truly belonged there.

One of the hardest moments came when I failed my first programming test with 44%. I remember feeling disappointed and questioning whether Computer Science was really for me. Seeing others perform well while I struggled brought back old feelings of self-doubt.

I began to devote more of my time to practice, research, and asking questions. Things gradually got better. I had earned two distinctions and a 69% average by the conclusion of my first year. I went even further in 2024 and received great marks in all my modules.

University taught me that intelligence alone is not enough. Growth requires patience, consistency, and resilience. I learned that failure is not a sign to stop—it is often a sign that growth is taking place.

Chapter 9:
The Result of Not Giving Up

As the years passed, I slowly began seeing the results of every sacrifice I had made. The long walks, the rejection, the hunger, the self-doubt, and the struggle were no longer meaningless memories. They had become part of a bigger story.

I completed my qualification in record time with 15 distinctions and a 77% overall average. Standing at the edge of graduation felt surreal because there was once a time when even attending university felt impossible.

However, what had changed most was me, not my academic accomplishments. I had grown to be more disciplined, wiser, and powerful than I could have ever thought.

Success did not arrive overnight. It was built through small decisions repeated consistently over time. Looking back, I realize that persistence changed my life more than talent ever could.

Chapter 10:
More Than Just a Story

As I reflect on everything I have experienced, I realize this journey was never only about academics. Yes, the distinctions mattered. Yes, graduating mattered. But the real transformation happened within me long before the certificates and results arrived.

This story is about resilience. It is about learning how to keep moving even when life gives you every reason to stop. It is about discovering your identity through struggle and finding purpose through pain.

There were moments when I felt invisible. Moments when I questioned whether my dreams were realistic. Coming from a rural background with limited resources often made success feel distant. Sometimes it felt like the world expected very little from people like us.

But every challenge taught me something valuable. Walking long distances to school taught me endurance. Studying while hungry taught me discipline. Rejection taught me patience. Failure taught me humility. And every setback taught me that growth often happens quietly before it becomes visible to others.

I also began to realize that my story was not unique. Across South Africa, there are thousands of young people carrying dreams bigger than their circumstances. Many are intelligent, hardworking, and determined—but lack opportunities, guidance, or support. Some are fighting silent battles nobody sees.

That is why I chose to tell this story openly. Not because my journey was perfect, but because it was real. I wanted someone who feels delayed, discouraged, or forgotten to understand that their current situation does not have to become their final destination.

Chapter 11:
What I Learned From All This

This journey taught me lessons that no classroom could ever fully teach. Some lessons came through pain. Others came through failure, disappointment, and persistence. But each one shaped the person I am becoming.

I learned that your starting point does not define your destination. There was a time when my future looked uncertain and limited. I came from humble beginnings, faced financial struggles, and experienced delays that made me feel left behind. But over time, I realized that where you begin in life does not determine how far you can go.

I learned that delays are not denials. Watching others progress while I remained stuck was emotionally painful. There were moments when I thought life had forgotten me. But looking back now, I understand that those delays were preparing me mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for what was ahead.

I learned that humility opens doors that pride keeps closed. Going back to Grade 11 required swallowing my pride completely. Working difficult jobs during my gap years also humbled me deeply. But those experiences taught me the value of perseverance, gratitude, and hard work.

I learned that purpose is discovered through action. I did not wake up one day suddenly knowing exactly what I wanted to become. My passion for computers and teaching developed while I was actively trying to improve my life. Sometimes clarity comes while moving forward, not while waiting.

Closing Reflection

If there is one thing I hope this story leaves behind, it is hope.

Not the kind of hope that ignores struggle, but the kind that survives despite struggle. Because life will challenge you. There will be moments when you feel delayed, rejected, forgotten, or exhausted. There will be seasons where progress feels invisible and dreams feel distant.

But your current circumstances are not the full story.

You are allowed to start small.
You are allowed to fail.
You are allowed to feel uncertain.
You are allowed to restart.

But you must never give up on yourself.
Some journeys take longer than others, and that is okay. Growth is not always fast or visible. Sometimes the greatest progress happens quietly—in the discipline you build, the resilience you develop, and the person you become through hardship.

If my journey proves anything, it is this: *persistence can change your life*. A person who once felt lost and directionless can still rise, grow, and create a future filled with purpose.

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This journey would not have been possible without the people who stood beside me during difficult seasons of my life.

To my mother, thank you for your sacrifices, your strength, and your unconditional love. Even during moments when resources were limited, you continued finding ways to support me emotionally and spiritually.

To my grandmother, thank you for refusing to give up on me. Your persistence and determination opened doors when life seemed impossible. Your support carried me through many uncertain moments.

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To my teachers, lecturers, mentors, classmates, and everyone who believed in my potential—thank you for your guidance and encouragement. Sometimes a few words of belief can change someone's life completely.

To every young person fighting silent battles while chasing their dreams: this book is also for you. May you continue moving forward even when the road feels difficult.
Every step, every struggle, and every lesson mattered.

Final Words

For a long time, I believed success belonged to people with better opportunities, better backgrounds, and easier lives. But this journey taught me that determination, discipline, and resilience can take a person much further than fear ever will.

Today, I stand at the beginning of a new chapter—not as someone who has life completely figured out, but as someone who has learned how to keep moving forward despite uncertainty.

This is not the end of my journey. It is only the beginning. There are still dreams to pursue, people to inspire, skills to develop, and greater purposes to fulfill. But now, I move forward with something I did not always have before: confidence in my ability to overcome challenges.

To anyone reading this who feels discouraged, delayed, or defeated: do not allow your current situation to convince you that your future has ended. Your breakthrough may arrive later than expected, but that does not make it impossible.

Keep going.
Keep learning.
Keep believing.
And most importantly, keep becoming.

Thank you.